

## **Giving I-15 an “Extreme Makeover”**

### **By Council President Scott Peters, First District**

More than 250,000 cars per day travel Interstate 15, many of them driven by residents of Rancho Peñasquitos and Torrey Highlands. That number is expected to grow as San Diego County approaches one million residents by the year 2020.

In order to keep up with the region’s growth and to prepare for future growth, SANDAG (our regional planning and transportation agency) and the California Department of Transportation have invested in the expansion of I-15, a multi-year project that will cost close to \$1 billion. As one of the city’s SANDAG representatives, I can say with confidence that these improvements are a high priority for the region, and will help reduce traffic congestion and reduce delays along the I-15 corridor.

The project is broken up into three phases with staggered completion dates between 2007 and 2012. The middle segment includes the area between State Route 56 and Centre City Parkway in Escondido, and is the first phase scheduled for completion. Although we are still several years away from the completion of this part of the project, there is much to be excited about.

The “freeway within a freeway” will consist of four managed lanes from State Route 56 to Lake Hodges. The lanes will sit in between north and southbound traffic, and will replace the median. During the morning rush hour, those lanes will take drivers south. In the afternoon and evening, they’ll travel north. Flexible barriers will allow the reversal of traffic flow. Much like the current HOV lanes, the managed lanes will give preference to carpools and mass transit, and allow single-passenger cars access for a fee.

One of the most exciting components of the project is the use of Bus Rapid Transit (“BRT”), which is often referred to as “trains on tires.” The vehicles will be sleek and clean like a train or trolley, but without the dedicated track which limits their use. The vehicles will travel on the managed lanes, and exit via dedicated off-ramps to BRT transit centers along the I-15 corridor. One transit center will serve the communities of Rancho Peñasquitos and Sabre Springs, and will feature a park and ride carpool lot.

As workers rip up lanes and medians to make way for the new managed lanes, more than 150,000 tons of debris is generated and collected at a construction site near Ted Williams Parkway. Rather than deposit that material in the local landfill, the old lanes are being ground up to create fresh concrete for new lanes. This recycling project is good for the environment and doing the work on-site saves money.

Fortunately, the I-15 plans don’t face the same right-of-way challenges that plans for I-5 and I-805 face, so the I-15 project is well on track. This middle segment will be completed by the end of next year. The segment north of Centre City Parkway is schedule to be finished in 2011, and the final segment from SR 56 south to SR 163 will be complete in 2012.

For far too long in San Diego, road improvements have not kept up with growth. I'm hopeful that the scope and flexible design of the I-15 project will serve our communities long into the future.